

Making Space for The Divine

Practices of the Faith: Fasting

Relentless Series: Ash Wednesday

Lent Week 1 - March 2nd, 2022

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Matthew 6: 5-18

Daniel 10

1 Corinthians 7: 1-7

Exodus 34: 27-35

Proverbs 30: 1-9

'I'm not giving up anything, I am taking up some-thing. I am done being the sacrifice and sacrificing myself trying to do the right thing and meet standards and expectations that weren't made in consideration of me. Instead, I am making myself an offering. I offer my time and my attention I really dedicate my resources as an investment *towards* something. Not as a price, not as a cost.'

When Yeshua died he was supposed to be balancing the scales. But the way that we do so many of the practices that he taught does not take into consideration what his ministry actually was. So, throughout this series, we're going to spend a little bit of time focussing on what each of the different things that he taught about were.

The main practices are fasting, prayer, and tithing, kindness, the two commandments, and the wisdom and intuition that comes from being surrendered to God. He taught us how to have a relationship with God, and how to get the world out of our way.

When he did practices like fasting it wasn't as a self-imposed punishment. It was because he was healthy and strong enough to do them. He showed us how to do these things in sovereignty and strength moving towards a goal as an opportunity to ready ourselves for an upgrade in life.

So if fasting practices were meant to be about strength and caring for the temple, then for most of us fasting wouldn't be giving up some thing, it would actually be adding something. Originally the fasting practice was about re-dedicating the resources spent

towards food and spending that time in prayer and dedication to God that is undistracted by worldly needs. Though if you've ever skipped a meal... then you know full well that when you are hungry you are not 'undistracted' by worldly needs.

What most of us actually do need is to add balance to our lives - add healthy foods and practices. And so fasting is more about that than the sacrifice of withholding from something that you love.

There are three ways that we do fasting practises: one is to give up something that we want to be free of (like if you wanted to quit smoking or reduce alcohol consumption, or practice celibacy). It's an opportunity with a valid excuse to hold yourself accountable and override your willpower or use your willpower to override your free will, more accurately.

The second type of fasting is when you give up something that you love as a sacrifice. That is more like an offering and so when you do that the purpose is that you were willing to put God higher than anything else and your connection with God is found in that. In order to do that properly, you actually have to rededicate the resources to what you're trying to get, not just spend your time wallowing on the fact that you can't connect with the thing you want and call the fact that you are withholding from it somehow getting you closer to God. Instead what you end up doing is resenting God or your faith practice for making you miss out. We don't want to do that.

The third type of fasting practice is of making an offering. It's actually about pursuing something or taking up a practice that you normally wouldn't do. It's less about the resource that is being given up or repurposed and more about the investment that is being made in building a future and practising the new you. In this one, you are the offering, not the thing that is being fasted.

Our feelings about a fasting practice are entirely based on how we categorize it. These three ways of fasting can be looked at as Sacrifice, Martyrdom, Donation, or Offering. The first two can be seen as sacrifices: to give up what we don't want or what we do is to offer its resources back to God to be transmuted into something useful either for Him, ourselves, or a needy other. The resources regarding food are the money spent on it as well as the time spent in preparation.

It becomes martyrdom when you are in detriment for having taken up the practice. This is talked about a lot in the Bible, they call it inauthentic because it is mostly about being seen as willing to struggle for your faith. But, Martyrdom was originally an unfortunate byproduct, not a goal.

A donation is based on paying it forward. Someone benefits from you having participated in the commitment, whether that is God or someone self, as long as it's not you. This one is exclusive to the second type, where you willingly give up something you value.

The final way is also about a willing exchange, but there is no focus but to rededicate your resources, including you as a resource, to God's mercy. When you make yourself an offering you become a resource. The aim of the practices, as laid out in the Bible, is to get in alignment with God, make yourself available, and be blessed with the experiences that result. This happens in either of the later types: to give up what you hold dear and to take up what you do want.

You can see how each method, each intention, would shift how you feel about it as well as what your experience will be within the living of it. We get more of what we put our minds to, so if you focus on lack you will feel syphoned and drained, if you put your focus on laying things ahead (like in donations and offerings) then you may actually feel lighter and more hopeful as you are investing in a future.

No matter which of the three types or four ways you chose, it should be done in absolute reverence, true humility, and sacred privacy, as your practice is meant to be between you and God and about creating space to cultivate that relationship.

The Bible calls people out for often acting like they are grieving by doing things like wearing burlap and sackcloth with dirt in their hair to take away comforts and display that they sacrificed. This is showmanship. Yeshua says it is better to hide away in a closet, not because he wants you to literally seclude yourself, but to make sure that you are not doing anything just for credit and praise. Your motivations need to be pure.

To strengthen and connect in the pursuit of that connection.

To integrate unusual energies by having reception of the experience of communion.

To rebalance or intercede in surrendered petition whilst asking for change.

...not to bargain as though it is nothing more than a hunger strike as the result of a childish tantrum.

The principles are to give yourself a chance to reset, redirect, and rebalance.

To do it sustainably, you would prepare and taper. Not go cold turkey.

You shouldn't fast as self-punishment, so don't punish yourself in it.

Common goals are the major vices:

food, sex, substances (alcohol, drugs including caffeine or sugar), and technology.

We purge what we feel is out of balance
or interfering with our health, spirituality,
or our best and highest good.

Alternatively, we can also focus the fast on the acquisition or 'more of' orientation.

These are the principles of resolutions.

More exercise...

Eat healthier...

More meaningful time with intimate relationships.

These commitments usually last about 2-1/2 weeks. That's how long a person can maintain an unfamiliar habit and the excitement over it. This is also why most challenges are 21 days long - to get you over the hump.

Most biblical examples were 3 weeks or 40 days.

So, if you were going to take on a fasting practice you must be considerate of the humanness of your vessel. The point of a practice is to treat your vessel like a temple, and you would not trash or neglect a temple, hopefully, at least not knowingly.

Certain things are just plain old good fashion reliable science and with anything to do with the body you are looking at the law of three before physiological consequences make you collateral damage of your own best intentions.

3 weeks without food before the body eats itself.

That's when ketosis turns to starvation.
3 days without water before organs shut down.
That's when dehydration turns to desiccation.
3 min without air before the brain begins to die.
That's when the detoxifying benefits of breath retention
turns into the dangers of asphyxiation.

Studies show that there is a benefit from food-based fasting for 3-5days. Beyond that, there is no (or minimal) additional benefit. Intermittent fasting is a common religious practice and current wellness trend. In this case, you restrict and moderate food intake to intervals. Some science says the most metabolic benefit happens when eating all meals within 13hrs of the day, no closer to one hour after getting up in the morning, and not closer than two hours before going to bed at night. Most religious practices involve 24hr fasts, where the practitioner will have one meal per day, usually in the evening, and only water throughout the rest of the day.

Alternatively, we have also learned that it takes three days to break a habit as the body/mind will habitually crave familiarity. Many find during fasts that day one is exciting with the new commitment and confidence. Day two gets tough, but surmountable as the body resources stores of energy. By day three it gets desperate as frustration and emotions are also released from their stores and used as fuel to keep you going.

After that, it gets easier. You start to have moments where it's almost like you've just forgotten to or even how to do what you've dedicated to avoid. The habit (in this case: of eating) has been overcome. And in the end, it will take conscious effort to remember to make time and space for that thing again. Most of us have experienced a small natural version of this when we get busy and forget to eat, or had to pee, got busy and realized we didn't need to anymore.

Ideally, when you reintroduce whatever you've been withholding, you do it more mindfully and with more presence and reverence as a permanent feature of consciously participating in every consensual element of your life.

So, let's take a moment to look at the practical. Always be considerate of your own body's needs and your level of practice going into any fast commitment. That said, here let's go over a few traditionally based suggestions for 'withdrawal' focused fasts.

To temper the 'shock' of sudden unprepared change, do it in integratable steps. Trade overtly 'bad for you' habits with better ones to encourage a healthier relationship.

These examples are semi extreme full fasts as they are laid out here, which includes three weeks of the target practice within a 40-day commitment. Always taper and reintroduce slowly to allow your system to adjust. Reintroducing too much too quickly is just as bad as withdrawal shock. Thus in a 40-day commitment, the target is actually only a 21-day practice in the middle and around that is prep and recovery that honours the difference between your desired experience and your current regular or sustainable experiences.

Example 1 - Food Fasting

You may do:

Prep Taper Stage:

- ❖ One week of prep which includes healthier efforts trading out the major contributors to issues or the heaviest foods. i.e. treats and processed foods. (1-7)
- ❖ One week of scaling back i.e. cut meats and heavy starches (maybe eating vegan with gluten-free whole grains like rice instead of wheat) this is lightening the digestive load on the body. (8-14)
- ❖ One week of 'non-solids or fresh' which includes only soups, juices, and fresh raw fruits and vegetables like salads. This does not include sauces or stimulating spices as you are training your digestion to take a rest. These are simple nutrient-dense foods that are easy to digest and can require little to no active prep time. Because time, and the money of purchasing food is what is being fasted or rededicated in your fast. (15-21)

Target Practice:

- ❖ Liquid Fast: 1 week of juices and broths with no solids and plenty of water (22-28)
OR
- ❖ Full Water Fast: 3-5 days of juices and broths with no solids and plenty of water (22-24/26)
- ❖ 1-day full water fast (25/27) (up to three days if you are a healthy experienced practitioner. If so do only up to 3 days of juice before and after to a maximum of 9 days liquid fast. In this case, you want an outside source or professional monitoring your health and status as you go for your own security.)
- ❖ 3-5 days return to juices and broths with plenty of water (26-28/30 or 28-30/32)

Recovery:

- ❖ 1 week reintroduced clean simple eating (29-35 or 31-37 or 33-37)
- ❖ The remaining days introduce your end goal healthy eating habits (36-40)

Fasting Variation Options:

You could do intermittent fasting, which is what most religious practices prescribe. This is eating one simple healthy meal per day and only having water otherwise (or juice in some cases). This may be the ultimate target of your practice rather than an extreme or full fast. Intermittent fasting is also a great tapering mechanism during weeks one and two listed in our example because it retrains the digestive system to expect food less often. It is a great prep stage.

More extreme or less overt fasts are just as good if done with the right intention. Be considerate of your body, health, and needs. If blood sugar is a medical concern for you keep juices as a regular addition to stabilize, rather than committing to a water-only target practice.

Keep in mind that any one of these scales could be the ultimate target of your practice without any intention of doing the rest, or adjust the times at appropriate stages according to your goals.

Example 2 - Sex Fasting

You may do:

- ❖ One week - cut promiscuity. You would scale back what it is that you've been doing that you feel is distracting you. (1-7)
- ❖ One week - cut partner activity - get consent and be transparent with your partner's expectations. A sex fast can be a beautiful way to work towards much deeper connections, but without that transparency so everyone knows where they stand, the practice itself can take a toll on the relationship. Doing a sex fast together is an amazing way to strengthen a connection. This is essentially what folks are doing when they decide to 'wait' before becoming sexually active or the modern practice of not seeing the bride the night or week before the wedding. (8-14)
- ❖ One week - cut 'active self' participation (aka masturbation) (15-21)
- ❖ One week - cut self-indulgence which is thought and fantasy-based activity. In this target stage, you would be working really hard on mindfulness. Especially

considering you're at the end of a full month of dry spell by this point in the journey. (22-28)

- ❖ One week - reintroduce healthy fantasy. Dream your new reality and create purposeful expectations on the standard of connections you are interested in allowing into your life. All sexual activity is an exchange of energy. You've purged your system of the sludge... now it's all about upgrading your reality. (29-35)
- ❖ Final days - reintroduce healthy intimacy with or without activity. Explore sacred sexuality alone or together. (36-40)

Example 3 - Consciousness Acquisition Fast:

This means you are working towards something instead of shedding something.

You may do:

- ❖ One week of prep which includes healthier efforts trading out the major self-sabotage routines. This week would be about letting things go as the withdrawal stage. Use mindfulness and use the body to be present. The body is a great way to entertain the mind, that's why there are so many mind-body practices and why so many stressed people do running or weight lifting to get 'out-of-their-heads'. (1-7)
- ❖ One week of consistent guided meditation practices to explore and follow along (8-14)
- ❖ One week of breath practices and mantra to train attention without entertainment. (15-21)
- ❖ One week of small reasonable goals in self-guided focused contemplation. Train your mind to stay on topic. Ex. watch a candle flicker and nothing but that exists. (22-28)
- ❖ One week of longer practices each day for self-guided exploratory imagination. Be receptive to what may have been hiding underneath all of that mental clutter. (29-35)
- ❖ Remaining days of thoughtlessness. Sitting longer each day, bringing the mind back to the nothing at the centre of it all. It is reasonable to start with a goal of 1min, though I prefer 1min 17seconds. 'They' say that training your mind on something for 77 undistracted seconds feeds it into manifestation.

Be considerate of what a reasonable and sustainable goal is for you,
to suit both your needs and level of practice experience.

Keep in mind that in a traditional lent calendar, although it's called a 40-day practice, the church doesn't count Sundays. So from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday is actually 46 days. There are a few ways to adjust for this. One way to count is from Ash Wednesday to the beginning of Passover because the church tradition has a lot of prescribed meals and practices during the holy week. You are not expected to be practising your fast during that time as you would not really be able to participate in the prescribed practices.

Alternatively, because they don't count Sundays, you could have essentially what is a cheat day. What most practitioners do is they adjust the beginning or end count so that they have prep days before the conscious practice and after. Or you don't count Sundays because you would already be living in rest on Sundays and so therefore it is not an effort of fasting, but rather your regular practice.

Work with your nature and your vessel,
not against them.

A proper faithful practice of fasting is not meant to be an opportunity for self-punishment or self-harm, and looking dishevelled and looking for pity does not honour anyone. Make sure that your motivation for taking on the practice of fasting is with the purest intentions. Rather fasting is about getting the distractions, interference and contaminants that are working against you out of the way. To disempower them and get some space for yourself to rededicate to connecting with the things you do want rather than being squandered and defiled by the things that are not in your best interests and highest good.

It's all meant to clear the way so that you can be more receptive to the Presence in communing with God and embodying who He designed you to be.

Selah

Soli Deo Gloria,
Rev. Rynn Parraw